

# **Draft Environmental Assessment**

## **Access Developments at Machler and Carroll Trail Fishing Access Sites**



**April 10, 2018**



***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

**ACCESS DEVELOPMENTS AT MACHLER & CARROLL TRAIL FISHING ACCESS SITES  
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Project Title:** Big Spring Creek - Access Development at Machler and Carroll Trail FAS's.

**Date:** April 10, 2018

**Name, Address and Phone Number:** Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks  
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**Project Location:** 15N, 18E, section 9-10

**Description of Project**

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks proposes to develop public parking areas at up to three locations along the newly restored section of Big Spring Creek immediately downstream of the US Highway 191 bridge. Two of the locations occur on the Machler Fishing Access Site (FAS) and the other occurs on the Carroll Trail FAS (Figure 1). The parking would provide public access to the recreational corridor on Big Spring Creek from US Highway 191 downstream to the existing parking area at west end of Carroll Trail FAS.

Site 1 is at the east end of the Machler FAS immediately west of US Highway 191. This site would be the primary access to Machler FAS. The parking area would be sized for 5-10 vehicles. Development would entail graveling the entrance road and parking area, delineation of the parking area, and adding signage. The total area developed would be approximately 0.25 acres. The proposed development at Site 1 was first described, not evaluated, in a previous EA titled *Machler Big Spring Creek Fishing Access Site Easement*.

Site 2 is at the southern edge of the Machler FAS at the downstream end of the restored section of Big Spring Creek, known as the Mountain Acres parcel. The site is located at the west terminus of Fergus Avenue. The parking area would be sized for 2-5 vehicles. Development may include graveling the parking area, delineation of the parking area, and adding signage. The total area developed would be approximately 0.15 acres. The proposed development at Site 2 was first described, not evaluated, in a previous EA titled *Mountain Acres Fishing Access Site – Proposed Acquisition*.

Site 3 is at the southeastern corner of the Carroll Trail FAS immediately downstream of the City of Lewistown Water Treatment Plant. The parking area would be sized for 2-5 vehicles. Prior to any parking development occurring, the site would be cleared of abandoned buildings and corrals, which was addressed in a previous EA titled *Bank of the Rockies Property Acquisition, Big Spring Creek*. Development may include graveling the parking area, delineation of the parking area, and adding signage. The total area developed would be approximately 0.15 acres.

Additional development at Site 3 would include the establishment of a walking trail of approximately 150 yards from the parking area to a bridge crossing Big Spring Creek (Figure 2). A walking bridge would be installed at the location indicated in Figure 2 to provide pedestrian access from the Carroll Trail FAS to Machler FAS. The bridge would be a single span, 85-foot pedestrian bridge set on prefabricated concrete footers. Roughly 35 cubic yards of soil would be utilized to create approaches on either end of the bridge. The bridge would be installed with sufficient sightlines and clearance to ensure safe recreational use of Big Spring Creek and ensure the creek could adequately pass flood flows. See Appendix A for bridge plan

drawings. Trail development, bridge installation, related permitting, and maintenance would be performed and funded by the City of Lewistown. Montana FWP and the City of Lewistown would develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) prior to any trail and bridge development. Heavy equipment, such as backhoe, skid-steer, crane, etc., would be utilized to install the bridge. The proposed parking/trail developments at Site 3 were first described, not evaluated, in a previous EA *Bank of the Rockies Property Acquisition, Big Spring Creek*.

### **Project Timeline**

Site 1: The proposed developments would be performed by FWP personnel during the spring/summer of 2018.

Site 2: The proposed developments would be performed by FWP personnel. There is currently no timeline for the proposed developments to take place.

Site 3: There is currently no timeline for the proposed parking developments or demolition of the existing structures. The proposed trail/bridge developments would be performed by the City of Lewistown and/or their contractor during the spring/summer of 2018.

### **Need and Benefits**

The proposed developments would provide additional, safe recreational access to the Big Spring Creek corridor. The area has recently undergone a significant habitat improvement project and these developments would improve public access to the area. The area provides angling, hunting (Carroll Trail FAS only), birding, nature walking, biking, floating, and kayaking opportunities to the public. Big Spring Creek receives significant public use and the public would benefit from the enhanced access provided by the proposed developments.

### **Alternatives to Proposed Action**

#### Alternative A

The **No Action Alternative** would not develop access at the proposed locations and FWP would not meet its commitments made during previous land/easement acquisitions. This alternative would not provide additional access to public lands. This alternative would result in no alterations to the landscape.

#### Alternative B

The **No Trail/Bridge Alternative** would complete the development of the parking areas to provide recreational access to public lands. However, development of the trail and bridge at Site 3 would be abandoned, making recreational access between the Carroll Trail FAS and Machler FAS more difficult.

### **Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction**

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks fisheries division, City of Lewistown, and Mark Machler (property owner) may have overlapping jurisdiction on this project. Neighboring landowners and local interest groups will be made aware of the chance to comment of this draft EA.

The proposed parking/trail developments at Site 1-3 do not require any additional permitting. The proposed bridge development would require a Stream Protection Act 124 permit, a Department of Environmental Quality 318 authorization/waiver, an Army Corps 404 permit, and a Fergus County floodplain permit. As of the drafting of this EA, all necessary permits for the bridge development have been obtained by the City of Lewistown.



Figure 1. Map of proposed access development sites at Machler and Carroll Trail Fishing Access Sites. The red lines indicate parcel boundaries. The yellow dots indicate development sites.



Figure 2. Aerial image showing proposed trail and bridge crossing in yellow. The trail and bridge crossing would be part of the Lewistown Trail System.

## **PART 2. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
3. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
6. Existing water right or reservation				X		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors			X			X
9. Historical and archaeological sites	X					X
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
11. Aesthetics			X			X

### **Comments**

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

2. Inadequately designed bridges have the potential to negatively impact aquatic habitat by restricting a stream channel's ability to pass flood flows and naturally migrate. The proposed bridge would be thoroughly evaluated via the SPA 124 and Fergus County Floodplain permitting processes to ensure it would not negatively impact the aquatic environment. As currently designed, the bridge would completely span the bank-full bench width of the channel and have approximately 6-feet of clearance over the base flow water surface elevation. The bridge would be able to pass a 100-year event without compromising stream function.

4. The developments as proposed would remove a small amount of existing vegetative cover for the parking areas, trail, and bridge to be built, primarily in the form of grasses. The impacts from the development would be expected to be minor, as grasses and the habitat they provide are prevalent at the proposed location.

5. The proposed bridge development may result in temporary impacts to water quality in the form of turbidity generated from working near the stream. The impacts would be reviewed and authorized via the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's 318 authorization process to ensure impacts to the fishery and habitat are minor.



8. During construction, there may be temporary impacts to air quality and objectionable odors caused by construction equipment present at the sites. These impacts would be expected to be minor and short-term in duration.

9. Impacts to historical and archaeological sites in 15N 18E section 9 are unknown at this time. However, no disturbance to the site would occur until a cultural survey has been completed and clearance from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has been obtained. A previous SHPO clearance for 15N 18E section 10 was received on February 28, 2014 as part of an earlier EA. The SHPO clearance will become part of the EA once received.

11. The proposed developments all occur at altered lands and would not disrupt natural aesthetics. Short-term impacts to aesthetics would be expected during the construction periods and are anticipated to be minor.

Table 2. Potential impacts on human environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				X		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				X		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural production				X		
5. Human health			X			X
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				X		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities			X			X
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				X		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				X		
10. Demands for government services			X			X
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				X		

### **Comments**

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

5. Increased access brought about by the proposed developments may encourage public health by promoting outdoor recreation and exercise. The bridge would provide a safe pedestrian crossing of the creek. The bridge would be placed such that it would pose minimal risk to people navigating the creek, including clear sightlines and sufficient clearance. The proposed development would be expected to benefit human health.

7. The proposed developments would increase access to public lands and the recreational corridor along Big Spring Creek. In some cases, bridges may act as hazards to recreational floaters, however the proposed bridge would be placed in a long, straight section of the creek with clear sightlines and sufficient clearance to minimize the hazard at the bridge.

10. The proposed developments would increase the demands of local government services to provide maintenance and weed control at the sites. FWP and the City of Lewistown coordinate with the Fergus County weed district for noxious weed control at FAS's and city trails. Maintenance would be performed by FWP fishing access personnel and/or the City of Lewistown under the MOU mentioned.

**Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?**

No, the proposed action does not involve uncertain risks or adverse effects that would be extremely harmful.

**Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?**

No, this environmental review found that there are no cumulatively significant impacts from the proposed action.

### **PART 3. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment.

The No Action alternative is not recommended because it does not meet the objectives of providing recreational access to the Big Spring Creek corridor and meeting obligations made during previous land/easement acquisitions. The lack of significant impacts from the proposed action does not warrant the No Action Alternative. The No Trail/Bridge Alternative would achieve the desired objectives; however, the ease of access would be diminished.

After consideration of the alternatives listed, the desired objectives, and any limitations identified in this analysis, it is recommended that the proposed action, as described in this Environmental Assessment, has the greatest potential of fulfilling the desired objectives while having minimal impacts to the human and physical environments.

### **PART 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

Conversations with members of the public and interest groups have occurred to gauge interest and support for the proposed action. Previous environmental assessments for land/easement acquisitions have mentioned the proposed developments. The EA titled *Machler Big Spring Creek Fishing Access Site Easement* dated September 12, 2006 details plans to develop the site with a parking area and link with the Lewistown City Trail system. The EA titled *Bank of the Rockies Property Acquisition – Big Spring Creek* dated August 16, 2013 specifically states that the EA only addresses the property acquisition, however it also details future plans for the site which include the Lewistown City Trail system, signage, and managing the property as a FAS for public recreation. The EA titled *Mountain Acres Fishing Access Site – Proposed Acquisition* dated May 2011 details future plans for the site which include signage, parking, pedestrian access and managing the site as a FAS for public recreation. Public comments on the previous EA's were overwhelmingly positive. Comments opposed to the previous EA's were primarily concerned with the cost of the proposed acquisitions and/or the proposed restoration project. There were no negative comments regarding future development of the sites as mentioned in the EA's. To date, public feedback has been generally supportive of the proposed actions evaluated in this EA.

Notice of this draft EA will be distributed to neighboring landowners, local recreational groups, local sporting goods stores, and interested parties to ensure awareness of the proposed action. This EA will be



posted on the FWP website and copies will be made available at the FWP Lewistown Area Resource Office. A notice of the proposed project and EA will be advertised in the *Lewistown News-Argus*.

Due to the simple nature and minor impacts of the proposed action, the level of public involvement is appropriate for a project of this scale.

**Duration of comment period, if any:**

The draft EA will be open for public comment for a period of 30 days from April 11, 2018 through May 10, 2018.

**PART 5. EA CONCLUSION**

**Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?**

No, an EIS is not required.

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment stemming from the proposed action, this assessment revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action: therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

**Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

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**List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

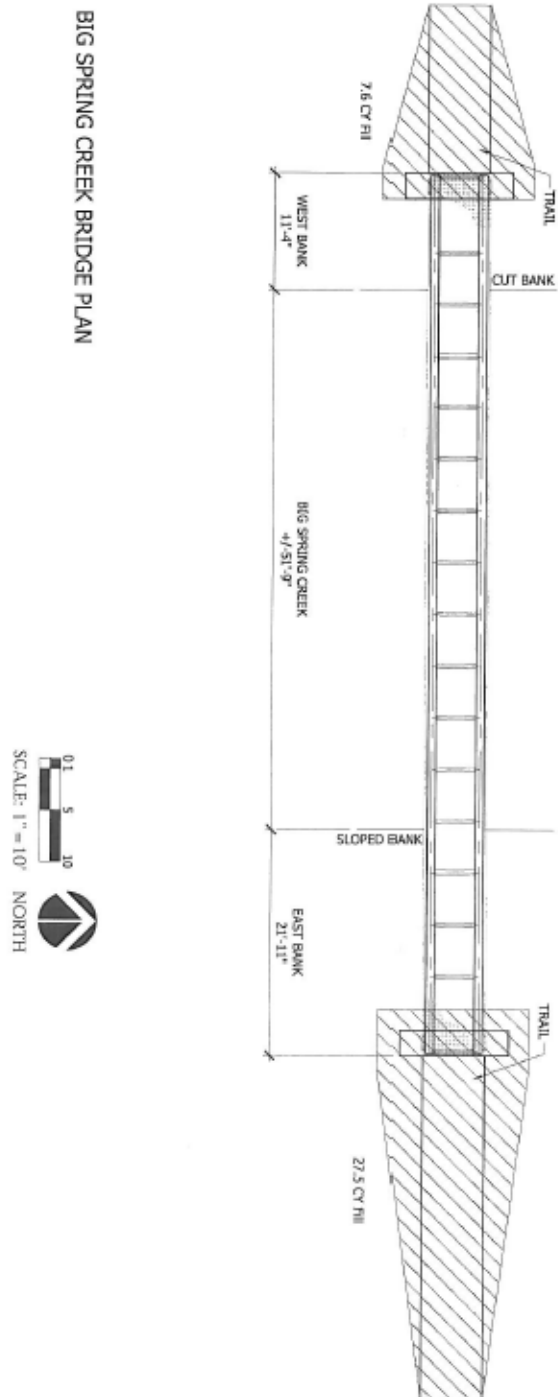
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office

**Date Completed**

April 10, 2018

## Appendix A

Schematics of proposed pedestrian bridge crossing of Big Spring Creek connecting Carroll Trail and Machler FAS's at Site 3.



Appendix A - Continued

BIG SPRING CREEK BRIDGE SECTION ELEVATION

